



Valley Broadcast Legends

Oral Histories

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Oral interview of

Walt Shaw

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Interviewer: Jim Drennan

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Walt Shaw spent 50 years in California radio and television as a radio personality, sales manager, program producer, and journalist. He wrote and reported for newspapers and magazines as well. Walt was a program director and popular deejay host on KRAK AM Sacramento, a major country station, where he was known as Uncle Walty. He also produced and hosted an hour-long farm radio broadcast six days a week.

Walt Shaw: Hi, this is Walt Shaw, and I have spent over sixty years as a broadcaster, starting out in Southern California as an intern at KXLA, the Station of the Western Stars, and then progressing up to the CBS station group in Sacramento, where I am now employed, and it's been a pleasure.

I've had some great times in broadcasting, a lot of fun and a lot of enjoyable times, and met a lot of interesting people, too, especially all of the performers that I've seen over the years and had an opportunity to interview. I've had a lot of Career Day activities, too, where I've been able to encourage other students to participate in the broadcast industry, and it's been a great experience for me and I hope for others as well. Again, Walt Shaw with CBS Radio.

Well, I was born in Covina, which was a small farming community, actually, east of Los Angeles, and the date of my birth was November 9, 1936, so I've been around a while. I lived there with my parents, and my dad died when I was thirteen, and from there, did odd jobs and things and helped Mom out. But I've lived kind of a blessed life, actually, because I had uncles who were well-to-do, had yachts. In fact, my first radio job was the result of being the deck boy at the Catalina Island Yacht Club. They had a guy there that met the steamer and kissed the girls and all this kind of stuff, and I thought, "Boy, that's for me. That's what I want to do." That's when I was in high school.

So I continued on, went to Bill Ogden's [phonetic] Operational Engineering School, got a first-class ticket.

[00:01:51]

Jim Drennan: Now, was that down in Southern California?

[00:01:53]

Shaw: In L.A., yeah. And I worked at KXLA as an intern, that was the Station of the Western Stars, and that got me associated with Cliffie Stone and a bunch of western performers. And I worked at a Presbyterian Church station and did the news and various types of reports, whatever they gave me to read. But I honed my early career there, and then I went to work at KSEO in Santa Cruz. I was there for a couple of years and then over to KRAK and spent the next fifty-seven years or so at that station. Later turned into KNCI, KHGK, and the CBS group. But it was a great career. I enjoyed it.

[00:02:37]

Drennan: It sounds like back in those days, maybe more so than now, when you went into an area like broadcasting, you did everything and you learned it. You learned every facet of the business.

[00:02:53]

Shaw: That's correct. We even did—in college, too, we supplied radio stories to the grammar schools through a closed-circuit setup, and if they were studying California history, we would write and produce a series on California history with sound effects and everything, just like the old days of radio. So that was a lot of fun.

[00:03:17]

Drennan: Were you a country western fan when you were a kid, or is it just sort of like it was just happenstance that you would up working for country western radio?

[00:03:29]

Shaw: Not really. You know, I could tolerate the music, but I wasn't a real fan of it. But Cliffie Stone taught me a lot of things when I worked with him at KXLA, and I got a show called *Look Back*, which reviewed the history of the various artists, and I found it quite fascinating.

[00:03:51]

Drennan: Now, Cliffie Stone, he had television—was it *Hometown Jamboree*?

[00:03:55]

Shaw: That's correct. Boy, you're right on. Yeah, the old *Hometown Jamboree*, and he also did a radio show which was on from 11:30 to 12:30, and it was really hokey. They'd say, "It's high noon!" Everybody would yell, "Hi, neighbor!" you know, and this kind of stuff.

[00:04:11]

Drennan: We had in Bakersfield—I'm not here to talk about myself, but we had Cousin Herb, Herb Henson, and he had that kind of program on television every night on the biggest station in town from 6 to 7 o'clock in the evening. That was country western, and it was live. And one of the kids that he had was Merle Haggard. But those were the days, and this was in the fifties, and I guess that's the way it was when you were growing up, too.

[00:04:42]

Shaw: That's true. Well, I'm listed in Merle's book as the disc jockey that he called up one night because I played his record while he was driving someplace down in the Valley. So he has me listed in his book, and that was kind of fun, too.

[00:04:57]

Drennan: What would you say were your career highlights when you were—well, now, you were program director at KRAK Radio for ten years or so, right?

[00:05:06]

Shaw: Ten years, yeah.

[00:05:07]

Drennan: Would you tell us some of the highlights of those years?

[00:05:11]

Shaw: Well, those were actually very good years for me, because prior to that, though, I worked as the all-night disc jockey at KRAK, and prior to that I was in Santa Cruz, I did a couple years over there, and that's where I got married, met my wife. We're still married, by the way.

[00:05:28]

Drennan: Oh, that's good. [*Laughter*]

[00:05:30]

Shaw: But during the time I was program director, I actually hired several people that are well known now. Lester Holt was one of them, and he did the all-night show, called himself "Lightning Bolt" Holt, playing country music. I dealt with a lot of the country artists at the time, I knew them all, had pictures with them all, and had a lot of fun with them over those years. The station won Station of the Year—this was KRA—now, for three different occasions during those ten years, and I got Program Director of the Year from *Billboard* magazine, and that was neat too. They flew us down to Nashville to get the award, and it was an enjoyable time.

[00:06:22]

Drennan: I know that a lot of stations now are formula, and the formula is set by somebody in New York, and you basically, if you work at a local station, you adhere to that formula, no exceptions. Now, it was different back when you were program director at KRAK, right? I mean, you kind of wrote your own, you'd set your own schedule and you ran your own shop.

[00:06:48]

Shaw: Oh, sure. And the disc jockeys did too. They could choose their own music and say what they wanted to, and pretty much it was their show. Nobody interfered with them.

[00:06:59]

Drennan: And that's where the payola scandals came from, wasn't it?

[00:07:02]

Shaw: Oh, yeah. *[Laughs]*

[00:07:03]

Drennan: Could you talk about that for a little bit? Because I think that's ancient history to a lot of people now, payola.

[00:07:08]

Shaw: Well, some of the disc jockeys, especially the big guys in New York and L.A. and Chicago and these areas, they were paid to play a certain song and to go heavily on a certain song. The record producers would give them money, cars, and girls and whatever they wanted, trips and all this kind of stuff. And that was actually forbidden by our management. We never did anything like that at KRAK.

[00:07:38]

Drennan: No girls, no cars, no—

[00:07:38]

Shaw: No, nothing like that.

[00:07:40]

Drennan: Nothing like that? *[Laughter]*

[00:07:41]

Shaw: Yeah, it was all pretty much on the up and up, and none of the disc jockeys did it either. They were all pretty straight and narrow. And a lot of them are still around, Joey Mitchell, for example, "Big Jim" Hall. These guys are still on the air.

[00:07:55]

Drennan: Yeah, and working at different stations here in town.

I wanted to ask you what were some of the frustrations that you had during your career? And let me elaborate on that a little bit. For ten years, you were program director at KRAK, but then you moved on to other things. Could you tell us a little bit about the evolution of KRAK and, with that, the evolution of your career at CBS stations in Sacramento?

[00:08:29]

Shaw: Okay. Well, in Sacramento I started out as the all-night disc jockey, but later moved on up to program director. But during that time, they closed the Stockton studios. We were a dual-designated station. We had to give on our station breaks Stockton-Sacramento. So they closed the Stockton studios and they moved all this stuff out to the transmitter, and the reason I went to the transmitter is because I got fired when the station was sold. A new PD came in, fired me, and I thought, "Well, I'll go

downstairs at the Senator Hotel,” that’s where the studios were, “and have a beer before I go home and tell my wife.”

Well, the chief engineer was sitting down there on his favorite stool, and he said, “I need a guy at the transmitter.” And he says, “It’s hard to get guys with first-class tickets. You have one,” so he rehired me. So he took me upstairs, put me back on the payroll, and gave me a raise. *[Laughter]*

[00:09:36]

Drennan: So you had something different to tell your wife when you got home from work.

[00:09:39]

Shaw: Yeah, right. “Hey, I got a raise, but now I’m working at the transmitter.”
[Laughter]

So I was out there for, oh, probably a couple of years, I guess. And a guy that worked with us as a maintenance guy, his name was Emelio Valdez, he was in charge of bringing all this equipment out there. So it was all sitting around. And I came up with the idea of building a framework studio inside the transmitter building, and another engineer and myself, we reconnected all this stuff out of the Stockton office and we put in a control board. It was an old Gates board, tube-operated, like they used to have. And we had put in three turntables and a tape deck that had like five tape machines on it. They were all Magnecorder machines. And in those days when we played commercials, we put about this much leader between the spots so we could run it fast-forward and count the stripes on the thing, stop it, and then you’d be ready to go with a commercial. So it was a lot of extra work.

So we did that, and then as we went on, I got the production manager’s job, moved into that. I did news for a while. Of course, those days, you had to do everything. It was a rip-and-read kind of news thing. And we had the old teletypes that clanked and clattered and made a lot of racket, and we usually kept those maybe in a bathroom or someplace where you could close out the sound.

Then when I was program director, then I had the option of hiring and firing people too. I hated the firing part, but I did hire some interesting people. Lester Holt was one, one of the notable guys who’s now on NBC on the *Nightly News*. And there were other people, too, a lot of women too. Beth Duncan was one of our newspeople. Kathy Manser [phonetic] was another one. She’s passed away now, but was very good. And several lady disc jockeys, too, that were very good.

[00:11:54]

Drennan: Really?

[00:11:56]

Shaw: Yeah.

[00:11:56]

Drennan: Was that something new at the time?

[00:11:57]

Shaw: It was at the time. Lisa Kay [phonetic] was one, and she did a dual show with Lisa Kay and Uncle Jay or something. I forget the guy's name now. *[Laughter]*

[00:12:07]

Drennan: Kay and Jay, huh?

[00:12:08]

Shaw: Yeah. But they were on the air and did a great job. It was popular. And Mary Ann Bailey [phonetic] was another one. She's now Mary Ann Breed [phonetic], and she married Curt Breed [phonetic], the director of the fair later on, and she was our traffic reporter. She did traffic news and stuff.

[00:12:35]

Drennan: Yeah, back in those days, radio stations had to do—well, did they have to do news? I mean, was that an FCC requirement?

[00:12:43]

Shaw: It was indeed, and I was the FCC compliance guy, so I had to take charge of doing all the FCC stuff. In fact, when I was program director, I got a call from Buck Owens one day, and he had bought KUZZ in Bakersfield, and he wanted me to help him do all the compliance work on that, which I did, never charged him because we became good friends after that. His manager was one of our sales guys, and the father of Lynn Anderson was also one of our sales guys. So I got an association with all these people.

[00:13:22]

Drennan: Yeah, Buck was—his studios were in the River Theatre in Oildale where I grew up, and the River Theatre was where I used to go see cowboy serials on Saturday afternoon, and then it became Buck Owens' studio.

[00:13:38]

Shaw: Right.

[00:13:39]

Drennan: And he was a big factor in Bakersfield, and we watched him a lot. Anyway, here I am, again, talking about my story and not—

[00:13:51]

Unidentified: We'll get to you one day. *[Laughter]* Should we do an interview with him?

[00:14:00]

Shaw: That would be a good idea, yeah, because Buck was—and I liked him. He would always come by the station and say hello to everybody, and I talked with him on the phone a lot on the FCC compliance stuff.

[00:14:12]

Drennan: He was a neat guy. I remember when I was living in Reno, I went to the Centennial Coliseum and they had a concert, Buck Owens & His Buckaroos.

[00:14:21]

Shaw: Buckaroos, yeah.

[00:14:22]

Drennan: Oh, that was a great show. They were musicians. Country western always had the reputation of being, oh, these were a bunch of hillbillies and they're not really professional music. Damn right, they're professional musicians.

[00:14:38]

Shaw: Oh, sure. Well, I had the opportunity, too, to do a lot of stage work, and one of the places I worked at, this was in addition to my job at KRAK, one of the places I worked at was the Detour Inn, which was run by a guy by the name of "Okie Paul" Westmoreland. And Okie Paul was the guy who wrote the song "Detour" that Patti Page had a big hit with, and he was a local guy too. In fact, he was one of our salesmen, and he was on the air too. He's the guy that used to say, "Tell 'em Okie Paul sent ya," after he'd do a commercial. *[Laughter]* But he would bring in top-name artists, Ernest Tubb and Billy Walker and some of these old performers, you know, and I was the emcee and did those shows.

I also worked with a group called the Red Garter Club. It was at the Red Garter Club in Folsom, and the guy that ran that was Truitt Cunningham and he was with Bob Wills & His Texas Playboys.

[00:15:41]

Drennan: I was going to add. Bob Wills had a presence here in Sacramento.

[00:15:44]

Shaw: He did, at Wills Point.

[00:15:45]

Drennan: Wills Point. What part of town was that in, Walt?

[00:15:49]

Shaw: You know, I forget where it was now. It was a long time ago, and I didn't go there very often.

We had another guy too. He called himself "The Cotton Picker" on the air, and he owned that Dream Bowl over in Vallejo. That was a big country place too. Let's see. Who else? Oh, at the Red Garter Club, we had a lot of the performers come through, Maddox Brothers and Rose, and Merle Haggard played there, and Billy Walker. It was a big club.

[00:16:22]

Drennan: Tell us about your experience with Merle.

[00:16:24]

Shaw: Well, at the time his record came through, and I listened to it. I forget the name of the song now, but I played it on the air, and when I did, this guy calls me up on the telephone. As the all-night disc jockey, I answered all the phone calls, did all the phones myself, and I put people on the air. In those days, they had a beep. You probably remember that.

[00:16:53]

Drennan: I remember that beep.

[00:16:54]

Shaw: Every ten seconds or something there'd —

[00:16:56]

Drennan: That was probably an FCC requirement.

[00:16:58]

Shaw: It was in those days. You had to let people know they were on the air. So Merle called me, and he was a nice guy, thanked me for playing his record. He'd gotten out of jail recently. *[Laughter]* So then later on, he invited me to go to his resort up at Lake Shasta. So I went with another guy, who worked for Assemblyman Eugene Chappie.

[00:17:23]

Drennan: Chappie. He was cool.

[00:17:25]

Shaw: Yeah. He was one of Chappie's legislative guys. So we went up there together to this fishing tournament, and it was great. Merle had his band there, and a whole bunch of other country performers performed, and we spent three days up there at the resort at Lake Shasta.

[00:17:45]

Drennan: I was so glad he lived long enough to get that Kennedy Center Award.

[00:17:49]

Shaw: Oh, yeah.

[00:17:49]

Drennan: Oh, man, I cried.

[00:17:52]

Shaw: Well, we worked with the legislature, too, to get him an award that was presented by the legislature here in Sacramento, so that was good too.

[00:18:02]

Drennan: On another subject, you did a lot of farm reporting.

[00:18:07]

Shaw: That's correct.

[00:18:08]

Drennan: Was that another FCC requirement?

[00:18:11]

Shaw: No, it wasn't. Our general manager called in one day and he said, "Who's familiar with agriculture?"

And I said, "I am." Probably that was probably a mistake, but it really wasn't. It paid off.

So he said, "Can you do a farm show?"

And I said, "Yeah, I suppose so, but here's what you're going to need to do. You're going to need to pay my membership in the National Association of Farm Broadcasters, I'll have to go through a trial period, and we'll have to establish a farm show and block out some time."

So they gave me 5:00 to 6:00 in the morning, and I did that live for several years and, at the same time, picked up a show called *Focus on Farming*, which I did with Howard Wakeman [phonetic] at Channel 10.

[00:19:01]

Drennan: Right. I remember that.

[00:19:03]

Shaw: So I worked down there, and then Howard got in an accident and wound up getting leukemia and died, so I wound up with the show. Then who—let's see. It was Mitzy Ayala who joined me later on, and I think she married Tyson the chicken king or something.

But anyway, we did these shows, and I used the *Focus on Farming* show to do interviews with the clients that I was able to pick up on the radio. So that was pretty cool for them, because they'd get a free half-hour TV show on Channel 10 out of that.

[00:19:41]

Drennan: Was that on once a week, *Focus on Farming*?

[00:19:44]

Shaw: Saturday morning, yeah, and I would tape it on Friday night, so I always had the closing commodity prices, so it was current, you know, for—

[00:19:54]

Drennan: Right. And you had a little excitement on one of those broadcasts, didn't you, that wasn't in the script?

[00:20:01]

Shaw: Well, I had a rodeo guy and he had a monkey, and the monkey got loose and got up in the light bays and was climbing around out there. Then there was another episode, too, where I had animals on the show where they pooped and messed up.

[00:20:18]

Drennan: What animals [unclear].

[00:20:19]

Shaw: Yeah. Then my daughter, when she was in Girl Scouts, had several white rats and some Irish grays, which look like regular brown rats, so I had her on the show and we let the rats run around on the table, and they were crawling all over me. And there was one cameraman who was just having an absolute fit because these rats were out. [Laughter] And especially seeing them crawl on me and stuff, that just drove him nuts.

Then another episode, too, was Mike Montgomery, who I think is one of our members—

[00:20:59]

Drennan: Bob Montgomery.

[00:21:00]

Shaw: Bob Montgomery, I'm sorry. Yeah, he was the director at Channel 10, and they didn't fasten the set down good enough. They had this big set behind me that said

“Focus on Farming,” and the air conditioner came on, and while I was on the air, the thing started to move, and then the whole thing came crashing down on top of me.

[00:21:19]

Drennan: And you kept on with your program.

[00:21:22]

Shaw: Yeah, I just kept on reading it. I was used to radio, you know, and all kinds of weird stuff would happen behind the scenes in radio. You just learned to keep on reading.

[00:21:32]

Drennan: The show must go on.

[00:21:34]

Shaw: The show must go on. That’s right. [*Laughter*] So that was a lot of fun, too, doing that TV show.

[00:21:40]

Drennan: In your later years you were working—so CBS bought all these, a whole bunch of stations in Sacramento [unclear]?

[00:21:49]

Shaw: That’s correct.

[00:21:50]

Drennan: What stations did they have in their group here in Sacramento?

[00:21:54]

Shaw: KRAK turned into KHTK, and we had KNCI, the Mix, the Zone, and, let’s see, the other one was—oh, I’ll think of it in a minute here.

[00:22:12]

Drennan: But they were all different formats.

[00:22:14]

Shaw: Different formats, that’s correct.

[00:22:15]

Drennan: You had a sports—KHBK was sports.

[00:22:17]

Shaw: Sports. That was switched over to sports, yeah.

[00:22:19]

Drennan: And Mix 96 was soft rock, I guess.

[00:22:24]

Shaw: Yeah. And we did our own commercials too. We used to have Joey Mitchell on a bed down on the Capitol Mall to do a morning show promo, and Jim Hall riding a horse in Capitol Park and stuff like that.

[00:22:39]

Drennan: Do they do that sort of thing anymore?

[00:22:41]

Shaw: No. No, it's all syndicated. I made a deal with several artists, and this was interesting, too, because we were never charged for anything. These guys said, "Oh, yeah, we'll do it for free." And we used their images on billboards, on the TV shows, and they did TV commercials for us and also radio shows. The artists were Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash—

[00:23:12]

Drennan: Oh, my gosh.

[00:23:13]

Shaw: —Emmylou Harris. Let's see. Emmylou Harris. Ronnie Millsap, we did his in Braille. And there was a couple other people, too, that appeared on television for us and never a charge, and also their images on billboards. Like "Willie Nelson's Country Home is KRAK."

[00:23:38]

Drennan: He became a friend of yours, didn't he, Willie Nelson?

[00:23:42]

Shaw: Well, Willie was an interesting guy, because he used to appear at Lloyd Hickey's Forty Grand Club, which was also a card room, and they had nude dancing and stuff out there, and I used to emcee a show there too. So Willie played one night, but he lost so much money in the card room to the owner, he wound up working it off and spending part of the next week doing shows every night.

[00:24:09]

Drennan: Oh my god. *[Laughter]*

[00:24:10]

Shaw: So I got to know Willie pretty good, and, of course, I had a chance to sit around on his bus and stuff, but the marijuana smoke was so thick on that bus that it was tough to breathe. *[Laughter]*

[00:24:25]

Drennan: I guess he's still doing it.

[00:24:27]

Shaw: I guess he is, yeah.

[00:24:29]

Drennan: He's about your age, isn't he? He's up there in—

[00:24:31]

Shaw: Yeah. He might even be a little bit older, yeah.

[00:24:33]

Drennan: I was handed this to ask you about the radio station at Pasadena City College. Was that your first gig?

[00:24:44]

Shaw: Actually, that was a closed-circuit station that went through the college, and that's where my wife listened to me and—

[00:24:51]

Drennan: Aha! This was given to me by your wife.

[00:24:53]

Shaw: Oh, okay. Well, she would hear me and listen to me every day, and they played it through the student lounge and stuff, and I was on the air there. It was KPBC. It's a public radio station there. So she listened to me and actually knew me. I didn't know her at the time.

But then I was in a play, I did theatre arts also, and I forget the name of the play now, but I had a kissing scene with her, and I thought, "Boy, now, this is cool." *[Laughter]* I really liked this girl, so I asked her to go out with me, and we started going out and led to getting married and our three daughters, and we're still married.

[00:25:37]

Drennan: And you're still married after all—how many years is it?

[00:25:40]

Shaw: Fifty-eight—fifty-nine years.

[00:25:43]

Drennan: Fifty-nine, is that right? Okay.

[00:25:44]

Shaw: Fifty-nine, yeah. And this was even at the old KRAK studios when I was working there, the night janitor was, I guess, a pimp, because the beauty shop at the Senator Hotel was then turned into a call shop at night, so we had all these hookers that were in there. They'd come by, and they all knew—I think the janitor told them the guy who was setting up the dates with the legislators and the people that hung out there.

[00:26:16]

Drennan: Was Artie Sanage [phonetic] running that then, or was that after his time?

[00:26:19]

Shaw: I think it was. But anyway, the hookers would start coming in for coffee and stuff at 3 o'clock in the morning, and so I let them in. You know, I wound up talking to these girls, and my wife knew all about them. In fact, at a roast, she shouted out, "Tell 'em about the hookers!" *[Laughter]*

[Interruption]

[00:26:49]

Shaw: —and had the main stage, I wore my tuxedo, and the whole thing was high-class stuff, and had a chance to meet all those performers, people like Steve Allen and Doc Severinsen and Tommy Newsom and a lot of the big stars who performed there. I was on stage with them.

[00:27:09]

Drennan: Walt, you have really had a rich life.

[00:27:13]

Shaw: Oh, yeah.

[00:27:14]

Drennan: And you're still going strong.

[00:27:16]

Shaw: Well, I don't know how strong I'm going now, but I'm still having fun.

[00:27:19]

Drennan: You're still going.

[00:27:19]

Shaw: Then another big part that I got, too, is that I was working with Chuck Swift years ago, and I did commercials for him, and I put together a storyboard, and they gave me a Jeep to take off road, and then I had to do the remote broadcast and show them, sign pictures of the Jeep and stuff that I took and talk to people, try to sell them cars. So

while I was doing that, after I got done with driving the Jeep for a week, I took it back to the dealer, and Chuck says, "Oh, it's not our Jeep. It's a manufacturing car. Somebody'll pick it up."

So this guy by the name of Bruce Devon [phonetic] shows up, and he worked for Page 1 Automotive in San Francisco. And he says, "We're just starting up and we're looking for clients, and if you do a car show every week, we'll give you a new car to drive every week."

So I ran that by the general manager, and he says, "Well, what about the payola thing?" So we had a big discussion about that, and he says, "I'll tell you what. Do four shows and make sure I get the tapes, and we'll send them to the attorneys and see if it's okay." He came back and he said, "That's a good consumer reviewer show that you're doing there." He says, "Nothing the matter with that at all."

So I said, "Well, thanks a lot." So I suddenly had an auto show, and the sales department, didn't take them very long, a week, to sell it, so I had a sponsor on it, and it was only a five-minute piece that I did, but I did a car review and some automotive news. So I did that for thirty-some years, maybe forty years. I got a new car every week to drive. [Laughter] But I had to write a script and wrote the piece.

But then I branched out into some newspapers, and I wound up getting a mini syndication with a newspaper group from Southern California, and it was for senior citizens, so a senior newspaper. They had an outlet in Reno and down in Apple Valley, Palm Springs, and that area. I did that. Then I picked up the *Elk Grove Citizen* and several others, and then magazines. The station used to put out a magazine, and it was a country music magazine, so I started writing the car articles and truck articles for them. So I had both, and then became a member of the Western Automotive Journalists, and I was one of the founding members for that.

[00:29:55]

Drennan: You received awards, too, for your farm reporting, didn't you?

[00:29:59]

Shaw: That's correct, yeah. In fact, I brought some of them with me in a box, but they're online, too, and I will email you guys some of those pictures. But I got the Farm Bureau, their first award for Farm Broadcaster of the Year, and then I picked up several FFA awards. In fact, I've got a whole bunch of awards. My office was full of them. Well, you've been to my office, I think, and seen some of those, or not?

[00:30:27]

Drennan: No, I haven't. Oh, yes, sure, I have. I've done interviews for Alzheimer's.

[00:30:31]

Shaw: That's right.

[00:30:32]

Drennan: Absolutely.

[00:30:33]

Shaw: But let's see. Let me check my—yeah, Newsperson of the Year, National Cattlewomen's Silver Cow Bell Award. That was good for taking to the Kings games. California Cattlemen's Association, Honorary State and National American Farmer degrees. I received the awards for FFA, several of those. An Honorary American Farmer degree. Had a lot of them. In fact, from—I forget the date that I actually got them. Let me look and see when I started getting those.

[Interruption]

[00:31:15]

Shaw: Anyway, when I started receiving those awards, I got awards almost every year for my entire career.

[00:31:21]

Drennan: Well, what a career it has been. What do you think the future of broadcasting is or the kind of thing that, well, you and I and all the rest of us—

[00:31:36]

Shaw: Well, I wanted to mention one other thing too.

[00:31:38]

Drennan: Sure.

[00:31:39]

Shaw: One other award that I received, and that was one of the top awards, from Cal State University. I received an award for—it was a VIP award, and was up onstage and had to give a speech at their Alumni Association and that sort of thing. But, anyway, that was one of the prestigious ones.

Well, for broadcasting, so much of it is automated now, and even at the station where we hired all-night disc jockeys like Lester, it's all automated now. It's all voice tracked.

[00:32:14]

Drennan: So who is doing those programs? Is it some guy in New York or L.A.?

[00:32:21]

Shaw: No, no, no. The disc jockeys do them, so it sounds like you have a live disc jockey, and they record them during the day and it's put in the system, and the computer plays them at night.

[00:32:32]

Drennan: But it's not a live person at the time of the broadcast like it used to be.

[00:32:39]

Shaw: No, not anymore. It used to be all live, yeah.

[00:32:43]

Drennan: And so nothing can go wrong.

[00:32:45]

Shaw: Right. *[Laughter]* Well, we had a guy on the air when I was doing the all-night show, his name was Dick Hanes [phonetic], and he was from L.A., had a show called *Hanes at the Reins*. He told me, he says, "You ought to call yourself something. He said, "Call yourself the 'Midnight Sun.'"

[00:33:01]

Drennan: The Midnight Sun.

[00:33:03]

Shaw: So I started doing that down there. "Hey, Cousin Walt here, the Midnight Sun, bringing the bright sunshine to all of you nighttime listeners," this kind of stuff. And in those days, too, we had little things we'd say. Rather than being funny, we'd practice and learn things to say, like if you played "Love Letters in the Sand," you might call it musical Sanskrit, stuff like that. We all did that as disc jockeys, and had names for everything, the Velvet Fog with Mel Tormé, and the Singing Rage Patti Page, and this kind of stuff.

[00:33:46]

Drennan: But you had—and I think this is all through your career, it sounds like, you had the opportunity to exercise your own creativity.

[00:33:54]

Shaw: That's correct.

[00:33:55]

Drennan: That's such a great thing to be able to do.

[00:33:57]

Shaw: And the playlists were very loose and large. We could play whatever we wanted to. Then we did a lot of interview pieces too. I worked with the State Fair back in those early days, and my first commercial interview—and I was really nervous, I was uptight about this—was Connie Francis.

[00:34:17]

Drennan: Oh my gosh.

[00:34:18]

Shaw: And at the time, the State Fair had a regular studio where they could do—and it was designed for radio at the time, but later converted over to TV. But it was a lot of fun in those days, a lot more fun than it is now where you have to follow a format and you're hampered by a tight rein from the general manager or the program director. It was pretty loose. We just did what we wanted to do. When you're on the air, it was our show. We were the boss.

[00:34:48]

Drennan: Can't beat that.

[00:34:50]

Shaw: No. So it was a great time and it's been a good career for me, and it's just been fun.

[00:35:03]

Drennan: I think that's what most of us in broadcasting think of it as fun, actually getting paid for doing what you love to do.

[00:35:11]

Shaw: Oh, for sure, yeah. Even from my early days at Catalina, when I went to visit Carl Bailey and shadow him, who was the disc jockey. He did morning shows at KBIG.

[00:35:24]

Drennan: KBIG, I remember that.

[00:35:26]

Shaw: And then he met the boat when it came in at 11:30 or 12 o'clock or whenever it was. But I went up with him, asked him one day if I could go with him, and he said, "Sure, if you want to get up at 3mo'clock in the morning." But I was fascinated with all the equipment. I couldn't believe the stuff that he did. These guys were so glib and so in tune with what was going on in the world and were funny and did all these different things. We had one of our legends guys, in fact, who worked at KBIG years past, worked with Carl and some of the other people.

[00:36:03]

Drennan: Was that Don [unclear]?

[00:36:05]

Shaw: Yeah, he became an advocate for handicapped people and for the aged—

[00:36:13]

Drennan: Oh, really?

[00:36:14]

Shaw: —later on, yeah, and worked for the state. But, yeah, in those days, I was just fascinated with all this stuff that he had to do. It was a daytime station, so he had to go and fire diesel generators up in the morning, in order to get the thing to run. And at the old transmitter, believe it or not, I carried a pistol with me to shoot rattlesnakes, and I wound up catching—I think it was four of the escapees from the Preston School of Industry.

[00:36:49]

Drennan: Oh, jeez. Tell us about that.

[00:36:51]

Shaw: And calling the cops.

[00:36:53]

Drennan: So how did you capture them? Point a gun at them?

[00:36:55]

Shaw: Yeah. I carried a pistol with me. In fact, I still have it. It's kind of an antique gun. But we had a shotgun out there, so the transmitter building was well armed.

[00:37:09]

Drennan: A man for all seasons.

[00:37:12]

Shaw: Yeah. I called the cops, of course, and the sheriff showed up, but by that time I had them sitting down and they were waiting for the sheriff to come. *[Laughter]*

[00:37:24]

Drennan: Did you have any stations here in Sacramento—are they running programs with deejays who are also doing shows for, say, stations in San Francisco or Portland or Seattle? I mean, basically do the stations have deejays who are solely for those stations?

[00:37:46]

Shaw: Some do and some don't. But Tom Buck, who was one of our members, he does a lot of recording for—you can hear his commercials all over the country. But a lot of people do that. You might hear them in San Francisco or Los Angeles or some other places. In fact, we have one guy that does do a lot of that, and that's our sports guy at KHDK. He's on ESPN. And we had a lady, too, that did a lot of ESPN stuff. They'd record and voice-track stuff at our stations here in Sacramento, and it would play all over the country. So that's fairly common.

[00:38:29]

Drennan: Yeah, I remember *The Music of Your Life* was on, what, KCRA, KGNR. It was on some station here.

[00:38:40]

Shaw: Yeah.

[00:38:41]

Drennan: But it was a national show.

[00:38:44]

Shaw: Syndicated show, yeah.

[00:38:46]

Drennan: Syndicated show, yeah.

[00:38:48]

Shaw: And a lot of that is done on the satellite, too, pick up satellite stuff. And a lot of the stations are doing that too. In fact, even our stations at CBS, they run the satellite at night or have an automated voice-track station. So that's still very common.

Gone are the days when we had multiple tape recorders. You had to stand up to do a show because you were so busy stringing up commercials and bits and doing your thing for the various outlets. But those days are all gone now, and it's very simple. The disc jockeys run computers, and it's all fingertip stuff. In fact, when I first started at KRAK, we had an old Westinghouse 5-kilowatt transmitter that was pretty much broken down, and we had to have an electric heater with the door open and the inner locks taped shut to keep the mercury vapor tubes warm enough to continue broadcasting. Plus we had an FM transmitter in there, and it had two cranks on it to keep it on frequency because it would jump all over the dial, unlike the crystal controls that came later, and now it's all computerized. So it was a big difference in the technology.

[00:40:23]

Drennan: Oh, I guess.

[00:40:24]

Unidentified: Can you walk through the technology from when you began to today, the changes you've seen?

[00:40:30]

Drennan: Yeah, that's a great idea. Can you walk through sort of what the technology was like when you started, compared with the changes took place over the years?

[00:40:44]

Shaw: Well, we used reel-to-reel tape, for one thing, and you had to string tape up to play your commercials and things, or we had to cut discs, and we had a recording device where we would sit down at a table, and if you messed up, the engineer would have a fit because you had to throw the disc away, because it was put on an acetate thing.

[00:41:12]

Drennan: Like a record.

[00:41:13]

Shaw: Yeah, on a record. Then we later went to the tapes, the cassette-type tapes, and then later to the cartridges for commercials, but we still played records up until not too many years ago.

[00:41:30]

Drennan: Really?

[00:41:31]

Shaw: Everything now is all computerized and push-button and makes it very easy for the disc jockey. They can set up a whole day's show just by selecting the songs they want to play.

[00:41:45]

Drennan: So it's not as much physical effort as there was back in those days when you really had to actually hustle and do a lot of different things.

[00:41:55]

Shaw: That's true, do a lot of different things, yeah.

[00:41:57]

Drennan: But on the plus side of the old days was you had more freedom and ability to exercise your own [unclear].

[00:42:08]

Shaw: That's correct, yeah.

[00:42:10]

Drennan: That's the price we pay.

[00:42:13]

Shaw: Unfortunately, a lot of the old electronic schools went out of business after they changed the rules on having to have a first-class ticket, and to get the test for that, and, as you probably know, you had to go through three elements and take a test at the FCC office. One was rules and regs, and the other was electronics on how to fix commercial radios like police radios and that kind of stuff, and then the last element was all broadcast stuff for both radio and TV.

[00:42:47]

Drennan: Now, did anybody who wanted to be a disc jockey have to do that?

[00:42:50]

Shaw: Pretty much so, yeah.

[00:42:52]

Drennan: For a first-class license.

[00:42:53]

Shaw: Yeah. If you check our membership, you'll find a lot of folks that had those licenses. Then they went to a general membership certificate, and that's what I have now, although you don't need it now. So something to hang on the wall. *[Laughter]*